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A Brief History of Education

Taken from Pratt's CURRICULUM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

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The Ancient World

Individuals have recorded their thoughts about education for 2500 years. We cannot assume that, even before that, people did not think about education just because they left no record.

Unlikely that nonliterate societies devoted much time to abstract thought on questions of education.

Typically the child learned skills from a relative or an elder in the home in the practical situation where the learning would be used.

The nature of education in the literate societies of the ancient world suggests that tradition was more influential than deliberate thought.

In scribal cultures of China, Egypt, and Syria, aristocracy consisted of literate priests, civil servants, and administrators who conducted government business.

Education was formalistic--primary emphasis on passive memorization of sacred writings and national epics.

In military cultures such as Sparta or Arabia, aristocracy was a class of warriors--education emphasized training in martial skills, physical strength and endurance, and military virtues. Changed in response to military technology, i.e. as armed infantry replaced individual warrior-hero, the education became more collective, with service to state replacing individualistic ideals.

Greece and Its Legacy

Fifth century B.C.--Athens had established its cultural leadership among the Greek city-states. A balance emerged among moral, athletic, and aesthetic education.

Time of Socrates--Athenian boys of upper class received their education at private day schools--learning to read and write, recite poetry, sing and play the lyre, practice elementary mathematics, and perform athletic exercises.

Socrates' disciple, Plato, was also interested primarily in the training to be given to the elite, to whom the affairs of state should be given.

The educational thought of Socrates and Plato was essentially radical.

Their primary concern was with the question "What should be the ends of education?"
They believed that education should lead the pupil to moral discipline, spiritual perfection, virtue, and truth. In their persistence in questioning traditional curricula and in giving educational ends priority over instructional techniques, Socrates and Plato established a model of inquiry that has been followed by philosophers of education ever since.

Fourth century B.C.--An elite model of education was unable to meet the educational demands of the Athenian middle class. Changes in method and in curriculum were inevitable--a new school of educators emerged, the Sophists.

Sophists--first people who can confidently be labelled professional educators. They undertook the entire postelementary education of a youth for a fee, concentrating on useful knowledge and all-round education for life and for political leadership. They were interested in practical problem solving and persuasion. They developed eloquence and argument into the fine art of rhetoric. Their method was group tutoring, and their aspiration was to reduce every area of learning to an exact science. The Sophists made the first sustained effort to discover basic principles of instruction--first educational technologists. Sophists, such as Protagoras and Isocrates, had great influence on the development of Western education.

End of fourth century--Greek education had become joyless. It was almost entirely literary and specialized in rhetoric. Music and athletics were viewed as irrelevant to vocational competence and so declined. Heavy emphasis on rote learning was accompanied by physical punishment as primary incentive. School of love was replaced by school of pain.

Roman Education

Literary education came to the foreground in Rome in the third century B.C. The archaic Roman education, with its emphasis on the family, tradition, emulating one's ancestors, the ideal of duty, and the peasant virtues, increasingly adopted the literary curriculum in which memorization of the poetry of Homer, the rules of grammar, and the conventions of rhetoric reigned.

Roman education became bilingual and remained so for six centuries. A network of publicly supported schools spread classical education throughout the Empire. While both Cicero (46 B.C.) and Quintilian (95 A.D.) viewed literary studies as the foundation of education, both advoated a more general preparation for life than was typically provided in Roman schools.

Quintilian--first educational psychologist--advocated variety in the curriculum; the use of games, competition and praise, rather than punishment, for motivation; the use of modeling as an instructional technique; small classes; peer tutoring of younger by older students; and attention to individual differences in aptitude and disposition.

Cicero and Quintilian--curriculum thinkers--they deliberated seriously on questions of educational content and methods.

Preindustrial Europe

While institutions varied, the curriculum throughout the Middle Ages was basically uniform. Elementary education consisted of learning to read and write, and sometimes to cost accounts; the curriculum for girls, when they were educated at all, was usually restricted to reading and needlework. Vocational education was conducted outside the schools, usually by apprenticeship under the auspices of the craft guilds.

Secondary education concentrated almost entirely on studying Latin grammar, writing Latin prose and verse, and reading and translating Latin authors. Although several faculties of law and medicine could be found by 1600, throughout the Middle Ages university education was generally equated with classical studies.

Peter of Blois (twelfth century)-- questioned the value of this curriculum.

Erasmus (1515)--supported classical studies, but criticized teaching methods.

John Comenius (1632)--supported education in the native language, inclusion of science in the curriculum, adapting instruction to the intellectual level and disposition of the individual child, making ideas intelligible through relating them to concrete objects in the environment, use of the senses particularly through illustrations, constant attention to the use of what was taught, and equal educational opportunity for women.

The similarities between European education in the eighteenth century and education in Greece in the third century B.C. are far more striking than its dissimilarities. It would take redistributing the political power, the Industrial Revolution, and emigration to the New World to produce a radical change in the school curriculum.

The Victorian Debate

Education in the English-speaking world today draws its principal character from the dual traditions of Britain the the United States. Until the late eighteenth century this was a single tradition; by 1900 the direction of education in the two countries had changed significantly.

Elementary education expanded rapidly in Britain in the nineteenth century. The major controversy of the period, however, concerned the curriculum of secondary education.

Herbert Spencer (1860) published essay--"What Knowledge Is of Most Worth?"--he attacked the dogma of classical studies.

Spencer's importance in curriculum thought is twofold: (1) his attempt to formulate a rational hierarchy of priorities among areas of study signified a real advance in curriculum thought, and (2) he stimulated a curriculum controversy that ultimately led to radical changes in the curriculum in English schools.

English ideas and policies in curriculum remained shaped by a nineteenth century aristocratic ideal. However, England did produce important ideas and movements in education.

1960s--English ideas on elementary school environments had a considerable vogue in North America.

For the origins and main lines of development of curriculum design as a field of study, we must turn to the United States.

The American Tradition

Education was important in American society from the beginning--Harvard college was founded 16 years after the arrival of the Pilgrims at Cape Cod.

Massachusetts Law of 1647--provided for the establishment of elementary schools and Latin grammar schools.

The influence of the classical model of education began to weaken in the eighteenth century. Leading universities began to broaden their programs.

Benjamin Franklin (1749)--advocated a secular and practical education, aimed principally at the development of knowledge that could be used in the service of society.

Nineteenth century--Education in the U.S. began to change significantly from its European origins, establishing traditions that were to provide the background for the emergence of curriculum thought in the twentieth century.

At the secondary school level, private academies based on Franklin's model spread rapidly for the first half of the century. The evolution of the public high school during the same period was paralleled by a decline of the Latin grammar school. By 1890 basic elementary education was being perceived as the norm for all classes of people, and some 300,000 students were attending secondary schools, 2/3 of them in public high schools. Professional schools continued to develop in the universities in the nineteenth century, and vocational instruction was stimulated in 1862 by the Morrill Act--provided the states with federal land for building colleges that would offer agricultural and mechanical arts.

During the middle years of the century, support of the schools was

placed on a firm tax basis, and an organized structure of superintendency arose.

Massachusetts--Horace Mann--secretary of the State Board of Education from 1837 to 1848--founded the first normal school for training teachers, improved communication between the schools and the public, and raised the standard of instruction, facilities, and equipment in schools.

Connecticut and Rhode Island--Henry Barnard--introduced similar reforms, especially with respect to inspection of schools and the quality of textbooks and teacher training.

The curriculum of American schools in the nineteenth century expanded dramatically. Rugg reported that 75 new courses were introduced into the academics between 1825 and 1828. Science expanded rapidly in the second half of the century. By 1890 it made up part of the program of almost every secondary-school student.

This diversity of subject matter was not matched by a diversity of instructional methodology. The prevailing mode of teaching toward the end of the century emphasized rote learning and memorization. Textbooks tended to determine the curriculum.

William Torry Harris--superintendent of the St. Louis schools in 1870s--an influential defender of textbook teaching.

Colonel Francis Parker--superintendent of schools in Quincy, Massachusetts--opposed purely textbook teaching--implemented the ideas of Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Herbart regarding active perception and exploration of the environment, natural methods of learning, integration of different fields of knowledge, and application of learning to life.

Harris--became intellectual leader of the educational conservatives.

Parker's ideas, developed and elbaroated by Dewey, evolved into philosophy of Progressive Education.

Until the 1950s, Progressive Education was regarded throughout the world as the unique contribution of America to educational thought and practice.

Harris--inaugurator of modern curriculum thought. The curricula he promoted were unique for their comprehensiveness and detail. He recognized the importance of careful design of courses of study, of instructional materials, and of assessment of achievement. He developed the idea that curriculum design was a field of endeavor calling for special skills and procedures and requiring consideration of a wide range of factors that affect learning.

The Curriculum Committees

Unlike many educational practices that developed gradually, the

committee approach to curriculum made an abrupt entrance with the establishment by the National Education Association (NEA) of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies in 1892.

Committee of Ten owed its origin to Charles Eliot who presented a paper in 1888 on "Can school programs be shortened and enriched?"

Several important trends were initiated or reinforced by the committee, in addition to its introduction of the practice of curriculum policy making by national committees.

The Committee on College Entrance Requirements--appointed in 1895--made exact recommendations regarding the number of credits required in different subject areas for college entrance.

The Committee of Fifteen on Elementary Education (1895)--emphasized the central place of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, history, and geography in the elementary school curriculum.

The Committee on Economy of Time (1911)--attempted to determine the curriculum by an analysis of contemporary practice.

Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education--appointed in 1913 by the NEA--shaped the form and the curriculum of the American high school for several decades.

Heavily influenced by Dewey's view of education, the Commission emphasized the role of education in social integration, effective citizenship, and individual development. Seven principles for education were developed: health, command of fundamental processes (of communication and numeracy), home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time, and ethical character. Marked similarities between these 7 principles of 1918 and Spencer's hierarchy of activites of 1860.

The national committees had a substantial impact on the nature and substance of school curriculum, but were of little importance in the development of curriculum design. Major long-term effect was to establish three conventions: (1) central determination of curriculum policy, (2) curriculum planning by committee, and (3) reliance on university subject specialists to formulate curricula. These were to be of particular importance in 1960s.

Curriculum Design is Born

1900-1920--child study movement--demanded that schools focus on developing needs of individual child. Theory of mental discipline--cornerstone of educational thought for 2000 years-- was discredited by experimental methods applied to educational questions by Thorndike and others. Idea of efficiency--promoted in industry by writers such as Frederick Taylor (1911)--was being promoted by child-centered educators--urged that pupil's time be viewed as a precious commodity.

The belief that every field of endeavor could be reduced to an efficient technique was applied to curriculum by many educators--C.R. Allen, David Snedden, W.W. Charters, Franklin Bobbitt, and Harold Rugg. To this group education owes the immediate origin of curriculum design as a distinct field of educational thought and practice--Bobbitt and Rugg were most influential.

Bobbitt (1918) published THE CURRICULUM--first book devoted to curriculum in all its phases. Bobbitt's aim--education for personal and social proficiency. More significant was Bobbitt's idea that "curriculum making" was a field of study requiring special skills and procedures.

Harold Rugg had a broader vision. He advocated the integration of history, geography, and civics in the schools.
In 1920 he cofounded the National Council for the Social Studies. Rugg shared the belief of Bobbitt, Charters, and others in an emerging "science of education," but to a greater degree emphasized an education that would enable children to deal with the problems of the future in a changing society.

National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE)--1926--published a two-volume work entitled THE FOUNDATIONS AND TECHNIQUE OF CURRICULUM-CONSTRUCTION. Committee on Curriculum-Making, including Harold Rugg, Franklin Bobbitt, W.W. Charters, George Counts, Charles Judd, and William Kilpatrick, wrote this. The aim of NSSE was to compose a consensual statement on the nature of the new field of curriculum planning. Recognition of curriculum design as a specialized field of educational endeavor had been achieved.

Years of Hiatus

1926 to 1949--dry years for curriculum design. Education did not stand still, but the area of curriculum planning few advances were made and work of previous years was forgotten. America had more pressing concerns than curriculum design.

The Renaissance of Curriculum Design

Throughout thirties and forties--serious thought about curriculum design was restricted to handful of professors. Ralph Tyler taught a course in curriculum at Chicago and in 1949 published as syllabus BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION. This book was responsible for revival of interest in curriculum design. It closely paraphrased, restated, and elaborated on the position taken by the NSSE 24 years previously, and Tyler did not acknowledge that fact. However, it did serve to redirect the attention of educators to examine questions of curriculum design. Major textbooks on curriculum were written by Smith, Stanley, and Shores (1957) and Taba (1962). They summarized the current state of the art comprehensively and thoughtfully.

Long-term importance for field of curriculum design was influence of experimental psychology, especially learning theory, during 1950s. An application of B.F. Skinner's theories resulted in development of programmed instruction. This gave rise to the doctrine that objectives should be stated in terms of overt student behaviors. "Behavioral objectives movement" slowed down curriculum advance by focusing on how objectives should be stated, but it stimulated curriculum thinkers to take interest in measurement.

Public composure of education was shattered October 4, 1957--Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I, world's first artificial satellite. American people could not escape the conclusion that another country, the U.S.S.R., had achieved a temporary advantage in this area of technology.

The Russians then had made a major contribution to education in the U.S.-- The National Defense Act of 1958--authorized a billion dollars in federal aid to upgrade the teaching of science, mathematics, technology, and foreign languages.

Discipline-centered approach to curriculum produced reaction in 1960s. Bruner's thesis that children could at any age grasp the essentials of intellectual concepts was in direct opposition with evidence being produced by Piaget and others.

Subject specialists and critics overlooked the need for a comprehensive and coherent framework for curriculum design. The need was stated by Goodlad in 1958. Curriculum thought seemed to be in danger of losing touch with practice. Joseph Schwab attacked this tendency in 1969.

Maturation of the Field

Schwab prescribed the development of a practical and eclectic set of principles that would serve as guides in curriculum deliberation and aid decisions concerning goals and the actions necessary to achieve them. Curriculum design, Schwab proposed, needed to develop in the direction of an applied science. Outstanding progress was made in this direction in the next decade.

Progress that was made was due to synthesis of education and psychology. Those who made significant contributions to curriculum in 1970s were mostly educational psychologists. This was not paralleled by integration of philosophy and educations--questions regarding the ultimate and immediate ends of education needed attention.

New techniques of instruction started to produce outstanding results. Computer-based and computer-managed instruction were developed. The idea of mastery learning came about.

Benjamin Bloom (1976) published HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS AND SCHOOL LEARNING--reported extensive evidence that what any person can learn, almost all persons can learn if provided with appropriate prior and

current conditions of learning. Systematic planning of the variables in learning situations could produce consistently high levels of learner achievement. This brought about the notion of scope and sequence.

Major corporations got involved in curriculum projects. The educational field began to develop an international character--Torsten Husen in Sweden and Philip Taylor in England, international institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development--stimulated the flow of curriculum ideas between the United States and Europe.

End of 1970s--curriculum design was on threshold of emerging as an applied science!!!

Debbie!

You did an excellent job!

A+